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The Mystery of the White Helmet

by Vladimir Tatur
Vecherny Murmansk, September 16, 1994

On September 7, 1994, a program entitled "An Echo of the Cold War" was shown by Murmansk television. The program concerned the fate of pilots from a U.S. aircraft shot down near the Murmansk coastline in the summer of 1960. Two surviving pilots were looking for traces of their dead commander...

The next morning, someone called the editor's office of the local evening newspaper and said, "In the 70s, I had a U.S. Air Force helmet. I found it in downtown Murmansk."

We made an appointment and soon Sergey Vakurin came to the editor's office. He showed me a photo of himself in a white helmet with dark stripes.

"These are orange light-reflecting stickers. There was some kind of marking on the helmet but I did not care very much for it then. The helmet had an original design, a retractable visor, and a light filter made of darkened glass. I used to motorcycle in it. None of the kids in Murmansk had such a helmet."

Sergey said that he had found the helmet by pure chance. "I was studying at the nautical college at that time," Vakurin recalled. "Once, there was some event for us students in the Palace of Culture but my friend and I decided to go to the movies. The movie 'Romance about Loving' was playing in the newly-opened theater 'Murmansk'. I think this was at the end of the summer of 1973. We walked up the wooden stairs near the regional library and at the top, where Captain Burkov Street is located, I found this helmet near a newly-built nine-story apartment building."

In 1975, Sergey Vakurin was drafted into the army. His mother gave the helmet to Sergey's classmate, who was a regular motorcycle rider as well. He also rode about the city in the helmet. Later, Sergey's classmate and his parents moved into a new apartment, their address changed, and the traces of the helmet were lost.

Here arises the question of how this remarkable helmet found itself on Captain Burkov Street. Valeriy Gamza, who was the anchorman of "An Echo of the Cold War" program also provided the following details: The body of the commander of the downed U.S. aircraft and the wreckage of the reconnaissance aircraft was caught in the trawl of Murmansk fishermen. The white helmet we are talking about now may have been among the objects found in that remarkable catch. Such a version should not be ignored. Moreover, the first two nine-story apartment buildings built on Captain Burkov Street were mainly inhabited by the employees of fishing fleets.

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Currently, Sergey Vakurin is trying to find his former classmate and the mysterious helmet. If he succeeds in his search, it is possible that we shall be able to learn some new details about this tragic event that took place more than thirty years ago.